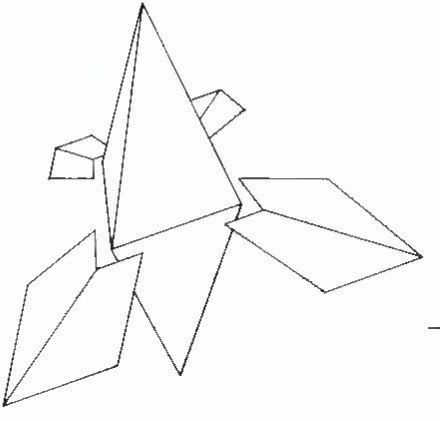
OCOIN

CHOLO



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CHOLO
For the BBC B, Commodore 64/128, Spectrum 48/128 and Amstrad CPC.

CHOLO was conceived, designed, and programed by: **SOLID IMAGE** [S-I] who are **JOEY** and **Glyn Williams**

Cholo Story by **Mark Pearson**
Package Design by **ASSORTED iMaGes Ltd**.
Cover photography by **OZ**

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CHOLO
INSTRUCTIONS

Objective

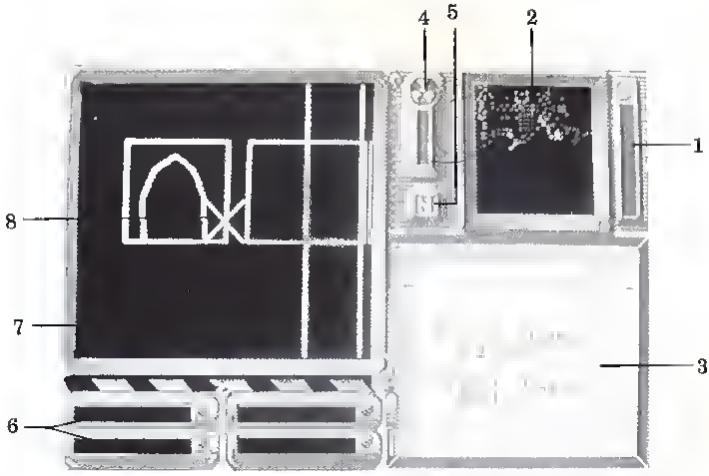
It is important that you read the manual so that you fully understand the consequences of the holocaust and the enormity of the plight facing the human race trapped in their nuclear bunker. More importantly, you will understand the full extent of your responsibility for their future.

Using the popular bunker game 'RAT', you have access to the only surface robot under the control of the bunker computer. All other computers and robots are lost to their own misguided and corrupted logic circuits, bent on maintaining the seal on the tetrahedral bunker cap. It is up to you to break this seal.

The robots are not totally lost, by hacking into them, you can reprogram them to accept your control and to access the surface computers to gain the information within their files. It is up to you to use the robots and information that you find wisely, so you can discover the secret to blowing the bunker cap and freeing the bunker population.

Getting Started

Once Cholo has loaded, you will be in **menu mode**. In the **view screen**, you will see a spinning **RAT droid**, the only robot under control at this point. Ignore the rest of the menu mode displays for now and press the **select robot** key to gain control of the RAT droid. Your display will look similar to the one shown overleaf.



1. **Damage**
   Shows how much damage a particular robot has taken. All robots will slowly self repair

2. **Map / Radar**
   Shows an overall view of Cholo city or your immediate surroundings if the radar program is installed. Neither operate indoors.

3. **Message Area**
   All status messages and important clues are displayed here, so keep an eye on it.

4. **Radiation**
   Shows how 'HOT' the area around a robot is. Beware, once radiation reaches a certain level, dependent on the type of robot, that robot will take heavy damage until it leaves the area.

5. **Compass**
   Shows which direction (N,E,S,W) the robot under your control is facing.

6. **Rampaks**
   These four rampaks are used to hold programs and text files which are vital to solving the game.

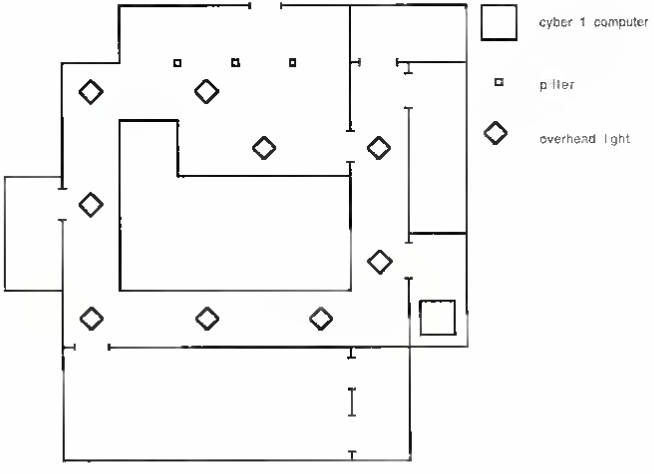
7. **View Screen**
   Shows the camera eye view from your robot's surveillance equipment, or the current robot in menu mode

8. **Sights**
   These will only appear if the robot under your control is equipped with a weapon

The RAT DROID starts inside the Central Compuer building, just off Bridge Street, facing the entrance. By using the **MAIN ROBOT** control keys {given in the key guide} you can move the RAT droid around the building.

If you steer the RAT into the computer room, shown on the map below, and collide gently with the CYBER computer inside, the RAT will establish an interface with CYBER I and will be able to swap programs with it.

CENTRAL COMPUTER BUILDING



Swapping Programs

Once an interface has been established, you are given the option to:
* **READ** a program into one of your rampaks
* **WRITE** a program from a rampak into the computer.
  DISCONNECT from the computer

Use the accelerate / decelerate keys to choose which option you want and then press the fire key.

READ Gives you a list of all the programs held in the computer's memory that the interfacing droid is allowed access to.
*This option will not be given if the computer is not holding any programs.

Use accelerate (decelerate keys to select a program then press the fire key. Now use the turn left / turn right keys to select which rampak you want to put the program into then press the fire key.
Note, you can overwrite programs held in a rampak.

WRITE Lets you store programs held in your interfacing robot's rampaks into a computers memory for safe keeping, and works in the same way as read. This option will not be given if your robot is not holding any programs.

DISCONNECT Selecting this option and then pressing fire will log off the computer and return normal control to your robot.

You will find the file **PasslTXT** (Password-list text) in the Cyber I. Read this file into one of the RAT droid's rampaks, disconnect from the Cyber and then press the **goto menu** key.

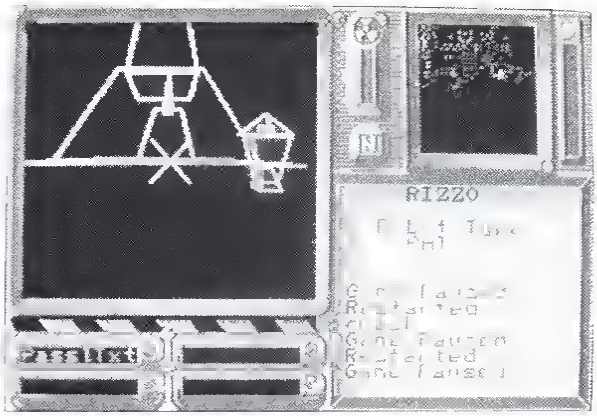
Running Programs

Some programs in a rampak such as RadarPRG work automatically while others like PasslTXT need to be run.

To run a program held in a rampak, go to menu mode by pressing the goto menu key and use the **next rampak / last rampak** keys to select which program you want to run. Then press the **run rampak** key.
The message area will indicate the result of running the program, if any.

If you run PasslTXT, you will be given a list of robot entry passwords! Note these down as you will need these in order to gain access to the other robots in the game.

Press the select robot key to regain control of the RAT droid and make your way to the entrance of the Central Computer Building Once you leave the building, your view should look like the one below



Hacking Other Robots

Now that you are outside, your bird's eye view map of Cholo city will be operational (unless RadarPRG is being run)
Your position is shown as a flashing dot top and central on the map.

You should also see a small Hacker class robot travelling East down Bridge Street Turn right, chase after the Hacker matching its speed and open fire with the RAT's ion cannon. After several direct hits, the Hacker will be **temporarily paralysed** and a confirming announcement will appear in the message area Stop firing, otherwise the Hacker will be too badly damaged to be of any further use That is unless you can find a way of repairing it later.

Now guide the RAT up to the Hacker until they are touching, and an interface between the two will be established
You will now be given three attempts to enter the Hacker's correct password. If you get it wrong three times, the robot interface is cut, though you may try again.

Once you have correctly logged on, you are given the robot's name

and password and the option to swap programs in exactly the same manner as with the computers.
(It is a good idea to keep important programs in more than one robot as once a robot 'dies', you will loose all the programs which it carried.)

Switching Between Robots

Once you have successfully logged onto the Hacker, Disconnect from it and press the goto menu key.

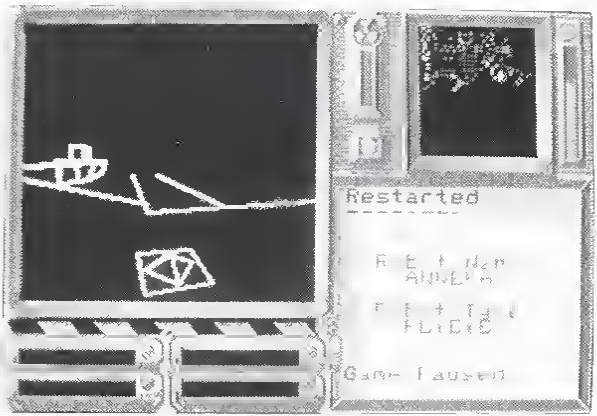
You will now find that RIZZO the RAT and IGOR the HACKER are being alternately displayed in the view screen. You now have two robots under your control!

You can speed up the process of examining the robots under your control by using the **next robot / last robot** keys.

The damage and radiation gauges will alter for each different robot along with its position on the map and rampak contents.
Notice how damaged the Hacker is after the RAT had paralysed it. A few more shots would have killed it! But as all robots have a self repair mechanism, the Hacker will be as good as new within a few minutes.

Use the next robot / last robot keys until the Hacker is shown in the view screen and press the select robot key. You are now in control of the Hacker and can guide it around Cholo. Notice that the Hacker has no sights as it is not equipped with any sort of weapon.

You now know enough of the basics to get used to the controls and get used to the layout of Cholo city with the aid of your pre-war map, before attempting to rescue the bunker dwellers.



Teleporters

There are two types of teleporter in Cholo city: one to transport you from land to land and one to transport you from land to ship.
To use a land to land teleporter, first move a robot on top of one teleporter pad and stop. You will hear a noise indicating that your robot is correctly placed on the teleporter pad.
Then take a second robot to the other teleporter and place it on the teleporter pad, again you will hear the correct position indicator a few times and then the two robots will swap places.

NOTE: land to land teleporters work in pairs. A given teleporter is only connected to one other. You will have to find out which teleporters are connected to each other.

To use a land to ship teleporter, first dock a ship on the side of the pier closest to the land teleporter. You will be told once you are docked correctly. Then move the robot you wish to board the ship onto the land teleporter pad. You will hear the correct position indicator a few

times and then the robot will board the ship. You will be told once you have boarded correctly.
To leave a ship, first dock the ship, then take control of the robot on board. The robot will be teleported to the land teleporter.

Helpful Information

Be very careful around the shoreline, if a robot falls into the sea it will die and there is no way of getting it back.

Be patient when trying to paralyse the flying eye. It will come down to earth every now and again.
If the flying eye is up in the air and not moving, move to a new position some distance from where you are. This is because all robots are continually working out where to go next, and if you are where they want to go and they can go no other way they may just sit where they are.

RadarPRG is invaluable when trying to find robots which have gone out of view. Sometimes this may be the only way of finding them!

The Guard robots always appear in groups of four patrolling an area.
If you try to take a Guard robot out of its area, it will die.
When you enter a Guard robot patrol area with a new robot, all the Guard robots in that area will be reset. Therefore, move all the robots you want into a Guard robot area before you start shooting. Otherwise the moment you move a new robot into the area, the Guard robots will be back at full strength and your shooting would have been in vain.

CHOLO

In the beginning was the light, and the light grew brighter
So that the sun paled in its majesty
And in the end was a darkness and its evil was mightier
Than the evil of Beelzebub

And after that the storms came and rains of foul pestilence,
A wind blew that stripped the land of life
And laid bare the very soul of Earth,
So that nothing stirred but vapours of poison

And the land became ash and the waters sick,
Defiled with a filth that would not cleanse
And the sky itself was soiled with blood
So that the Earth wept with the pain

Then the single seed, planted deep against unholy fire,
Cracked and flexed, and began to stir at last

CHOLO

The heat was becoming intolerable, a thin line of sweat trickled down the left side of Jared's nose. He wiped the back of his greasy hand across his eyes and blinked in the flickering amber light. Reaching out with his long bladed screwdriver he tapped at the lamp, a small unit that lay flush in the ducting wall. It glowed more brightly for a second then went out altogether. He cursed silently under his breath for the umpteenth time that day and hit the light harder; it pulsed weakly back into life. Jared hated it when the lights went out. It was bad enough being crammed into a two foot tunnel for six hours a day as it was, he didn't like confined spaces and he hated it when it went dark. He squinted back up at the circuit board he was checking and thanked God it was the last one of the day.

Jared was one of an elite team of computer maintenance engineers, there were only seven in the whole bunker. It had always been his ambition to become one ever since he was a kid but he had begun to regret his decision lately, after all it wasn't really what he had expected. He had grown up reading every history book he could lay his hands on, Blake's classic "The Development of the Psionic Brain", Jonson's "The Genesis of Computer Thought", you name it, he had read it. The computer was his life, though everyone else thought he was a freak. What's the use of it they would ask, after all in the bunker what was the use of a computer expert, except in maintenance. Even then it wasn't really difficult. The computer told him what to do, he just had to crawl around like a rat in a hole and fix the circuits that blew. An idiot could have done it. Jared sighed and flipped the cover back up on the circuit he had just reset. Squirming onto his front he began to squeeze arm over arm towards the main junction that lay about a hundred yards further down the ducting.

"Well that's me finished for the day."

"Thank you Jared." Replied a soft artificial voice. "Have a very pleasant evening's rest."

"Oh I'll try to, God knows who they'll send round tonight though."

"You know it shouldn't matter Jared. Sometimes I think you read too

many of those old books. Nobody reads books anymore."

"Nobody does anything anymore if you ask me" muttered Jared. After a short while he came to the vertical intersection and piking his body through ninety degrees he began to climb hand over hand up the long tube. His hands were greasy on the metal rungs, but the rungs had become so corroded over the years that his grip was firm, and he progressed quickly upwards.

Before long the light in the ducting became warmer and brighter as he drew near to the opening. Throwing his tool bag through the open panel Jared grunted and clambered after it. He sat for a while gulping in the comparatively clean air and stretched his cramped muscles. As he picked up the covering panel he looked down the long drop and shuddered, he hated heights as much as he hated confined spaces. He couldn't have picked a worse job. His power driver locked the panel into place and as the last bolt went home he sighed with relief. Five years ago when he was a maintenance engineer it wasn't as bad, and he would only be called out from the office once a week at the most. Nowadays it was nearly everyday, God knows what would happen if it got worse, he thought. Nobody else was the least bit interested in doing any real work in the bunker. He slung his bag over his shoulder and trudged wearily up to the transportation belt. At least he had some peace and quiet in the ducting, he thought wryly. The belt started to move as he stood on it and Jared shut his eyes lightly holding onto the rail on the side of his disc. After five minutes the transportation belt stopped suddenly hurling him onto the floor. He swore loudly.

"Sorry, Jared" said the calm and reasoning voice, "there seems to be a malfunction in the transportation system." This was not news to him.

"This is the third one that's broken down this month, what the hell is going on around here?"

"Oh you're off duty right now" said the grateful voice of the computer, "thank you for your concern but I'll have one of the other engineers look into it, it's really a very minor fault."

"Thank you," said Jared carefully.

"You are very welcome, have a pleasant evening." The computer was impervious to sarcasm. The tunnel ahead stretched for another two miles before coming to a transportation junction and Jared began to jog forward at a less than enthusiastic pace.

An hour later he thankfully pulled the door to his rest module down and stretched out comfortably in his plasto-bubble. He picked up his pod-

modulator and pressed a few buttons Immediately the lights dimmed then began to swirl in a myriad of pastel colours Soft instrumental music began playing and the lights seemed to dance in tune to its rhythm He pushed another button and a dilapidated droid wheeled out from a recess in the wall The droid was about two feet high and vaguely humanoid in form, although a mass of wires protruded where his chin should have been, and his eyes hung from their sockets at a most unnatural angle In his metallic hand he held a tall glass and the ice within it clinked as he moved erratically towards Jared After making a sequence of half circular moves he finally stopped in front of the plasto-bubble

"Gurginonic" it rasped and poured a measure over his master's trousers Jared quickly snatched it from his hand and dispatched him back to his recess with a curt tap of a button The droid was an antique that he had lovingly rebuilt Nobody within the bunker had an operational mandroid except him, although it was rumoured that the Guild of Neo-Vestals had a pleasure model but of course they never admitted to such a thing Jared was very proud of his possession He sipped at his Gin with satisfaction and closed his eyes He began to doze off after a while and was very nearly asleep when the soft music was interrupted by a pulsing tone and the lights began to flash He opened his eyes and struggled up, then pushed the illuminated square panel by the side of his door As the door slid smoothly upwards he could see that there was a young woman of about his age standing outside She was nearly as tall as Jared and her jet black hair was cut in the current fashion

"Hello" she smiled warmly, "I don't think we've been assigned before have we?"

"No I don't think we have," Jared replied, "Look, would you mind if we just took a raincheck on this evening" The young lady's eyes lit up

"A raincheck, what's that? I don't think I've done that before"

"No, I don't think you understand What I mean is I'd like you to go home, I'd just like to sleep on my own tonight" The girls face quivered and then she started crying

"What's wrong with me, don't you find me attractive?"

"No it's not that, it's just, well, I have a girlfriend and I don't really want to spend the night with you Even though you are very pretty" She gave Jared a puzzled look

"You know, you're weird mister" She tossed her hair sharply and turned around, calling over her shoulder as she stepped on the

transportation belt.

"I'm going to report this, you need help."

Jared sighed and pulled the door back down. In the bunker there was no such thing as a monogamous relationship, even though attachments were formed they weren't allowed to be exclusive. The computer allocated different partners each week and it was considered a serious breach of civil etiquette to refuse to accommodate somebody. In the early days of Bunker history there had been serious trouble with matrimonial disputes leading in some cases even to murder and rioting. Nowadays of course the genetic pool made sure that there was always an even balance of male and female in the bunker. Even so, marriage was outlawed by the central computer as it had computed that this was the commonest cause of unrest within the bunker. There was no such thing as jealousy anymore, after all, nobody had any reason to be jealous. It was a perfect community, perfect, that is, to everybody but Jared. Jared was in love and he was beginning to think that the emotion was as antiquated as his pre-war droid. He knew that there would be trouble for sending the girl away, he'd been called up by the medics before and he didn't relish the prospect of another visit. He turned off the lights and entered his rest module, the console on the far wall flickered softly into life.

"Hallo sir, have you had a pleasant evening?"

"Not really Lucy, no."

"I see that you're on your own again tonight sir. I trust that you are not unwell?"

"No, I'm fine thanks Lucy, all I need is a good nights sleep."

"Would sir like a cup of hot choco? It's very conducive to a good night's sleep."

Jared smiled, the computer was always trying to force the filfthy stuff down him, Choco was another thing that he hated and the bunker loved. It was true the stuff did make you sleep but it also made you unnaturally happy and Jared always felt his willpower weaken when he drank it. Who knows what would happen if the black-haired beauty came back.

"No thank you, tell me what it is you put into it anyway?"

"It's just a blend of chocolate and malt with hot milk, its very beneficial."

"Yeah I'm sure and what else do you put in it?"

"I've told you before Jared there is nothing else in the drink. I do believe you're growing paranoid in your old age."

The computers voice was as calm and reassuring as ever but he felt a

slight threat under the soft words. Paranoia was a serious disease in the bunker, with a community living within such a tight confine, panic was something that needed to be eliminated at all costs. The medics kept a check on anybody showing signs of paranoia or unrest and hauled them in very smartly for mind-probe testing.

"I'm only twenty-four" said Jared "and I've just got a healthy curiosity."

"Well remember what happened to the cat."

"The cat?"

"An old earth animal."

There were no animals within the bunker, except for rats, and nobody knew how they had got in. It was assumed that a couple had found their way in during construction and had avoided detection. Either way, there was a whole colony of them living in the ducting, the engineers had to be very careful.

"I'm going to bed now" said Jared with a yawn.

"Good night Jared, have a very pleasant night's sleep."

Jared screamed. Mindless panic gripped him as the metal walls grew closer and closer. He gasped for breath, fighting to draw precious air into his tortured lungs... it grew hotter still as the air grew thinner, this was the end, the walls closed on him and his hands bled as he tried to hold them back. His mind blacked and throwing his arms around his eyes he curled on the floor whimpering in foetal despair.

The soft orange light came on with a barely perceptible hum and a soothing robotic voice spoke.

"Is everything in order sir?"

Jared opened his eyes, he had leapt from his bed and for the third time in a week found himself standing in the middle of his rest module. He looked at the flickering console on the wall.

"Yes everything's fine Lucy, no need to overload your circuits."

He ran a shaking hand over his sweating brow and rubbed his already tired eyes as he sat down on the edge of his bed. "Damn" he muttered under his breath; this would definitely mean another visit from the medics. People weren't allowed to wake up screaming in the night, nobody had nightmares anymore. He pulled back the crumpled bed sheet and lay down, his eyes staring into blackness as Lucy automatically adjusted the lighting. He pushed the button on his wrist console and the glowing red figures told him that 'daylight' was only two hours away. He knew it would be useless trying to get to sleep and

besides, he didn't want to have that nightmare again. They had started only four weeks ago and it was always the same scene. He was in a room on his own, the electro-mechanism on the door wouldn't operate and slowly the walls would start contracting – no matter how hard he tried to open the door or call for help nothing would work and no sound would come from his mouth. Finally as the walls got closer and closer and the air was used up, he would just roll up into a ball and scream. This was always when he woke and his nightly dread was that the next time he wouldn't.

Before he knew it the lights were coming up in a gradual and steady increase.

"Its morning sir, time to get up and breakfast." The soft artificial voice was, as always, infuriatingly cheerful.

"One of these days I'm going to give you a terminal disconnection."

Jared's mood was not improved by another sleepless night. No doubt this outburst would be seen as another case of irrationality but he was beyond caring.

"Would sir care to take his shower now, the temperature has been set at your preferred level?"

Jared shook his head in resignation and walked through to his ablutions cubicle. The powerful jets of water pummeled his body easing his aching muscles. After a few minutes the water was replaced by jets of hot air which quickly dried him, he shook his hair and activated the shaving mechanism. The shaving sphere darted out of its recess, spluttered weakly with a thin beam and then dropped to the floor hitting Jared's foot. He cried out, a shaving sphere wasn't light, and hopped around the cubicle.

"Lucy" he shouted "would you mind re-charging my Goddam shaver." He picked it up and pushed it roughly back into its socket.

"I'm sorry Jared I'll see to it immediately."

He ran his hand over the rough stubble on his chin, dressed quickly and then headed out of his pod toward the communal food consumption area. He hated breakfast.

Jared hated the bunker. It was a product of the ultimate in human achievement in technology, the perfect defence against that other ultimate achievement – global destruction. It lay far below the city whose inhabitants it once encompassed. The city of Cholo smouldered on the planet's surface. It had been empty of human life for countless generations. Nobody who lived within the bunker had ever walked on the surface of the earth, and nobody had even talked to anybody who

had The subterranean colony was patiently waiting for the radioactivity that poisoned the city to dissipate and allow their return Robotic mechanisms and mobile droids monitored the radiation levels and, when it was safe for humans to return, they were programmed to release the seals on the exit to the bunker Today, the war that had devastated the world seemed like an old and half forgotten nightmare Life within the bunker was so ordered and tranquil that most of the population found it hard to believe that a war had taken place at all There were no Republicans and no Communists in the bunker, there were no politics at all The computer controlled everything and everybody was happy There was no panic and no urgency to get out, they were comfortable and complacent The bunker was their world, everyone had been born within its protective environment and nobody in their heart of hearts really felt safe in leaving it

Jared was the exception Everyday he monitored the instrumentation for a drop off in radiation on Cholo Everyday he was disappointed Today, as he walked toward the transportation belts he hoped even more than usual that there would be some encouraging signs He leapt over the belt system to land in the static area in the middle and then breathing deeply started to sprint along the long corridor He overtook two passengers who looked at each other and shook their heads Jared was certainly an eccentric

Coming to the main intersection he paused, and then, rather than turning right, he leapt onto the opposite belt and headed left towards the main computer unit It was here that the official daily readouts were given on the radiation levels upstairs He knew he'd be late for breakfast but this morning he didn't want to wait He started whistling and pounded further down the stainless steel tube toward the C.C U After about ten minutes of hard running he came breathless and perspiring to the security doors that led to the lifts He inserted his metal I D into the slot, then put his right hand on the shiny metal plate and positioned his left eye over the iris identification mechanism

The solid tungsten doors opened noislessly and Jared stepped into the lift, the doors closing immediately behind him He stared at the familiar illuminated map on the left hand wall showing the areas of the Central Computer that the lift and his security clearance had access to. He punched in the code for the Cholo surveillance centre and held the bar as the lift shot forwards and downwards at incredible speed Nobody knew just how big the bunker was but it was big, very big Shortly the lift stopped and, as the doors opened, Jared walked through to the familiar

sights of the surveillance unit He moved quickly to one of the desk terminals and seated himself into the moulded chair that adjusted itself automatically to his shape and switched on the terminal The screen displayed the usual request for the pass code allowing access and he tapped in the twenty-three letter and number sequence. The screen cleared and was replaced by a menu for the various sections on the unit available. Jared requested the latest report on the radiation levels topside The report was exactly the same as it had been for the two years that he had been requesting it.

"Radiation levels in Cholo exceed human tolerance"

Cholo was still hot Jared sighed, he had expected no better but he still hoped that one day the report would be different It was always going to be tomorrow.

He typed on a couple of keys and the report screen was replaced by the entertainments section of the main domestic computer. He flicked through to the games menu and selected the RAT option RAT was a kind of national sport and Jared was the undefeated bunker champion, nobody could even come close to beating him Today his fingers flashed over the keyboard with furious speed and a kind of weird light seemed to glow in his eyes Half an hour later he had beaten his personal best and set a new bunker record He gave a triumphant yell and spun round in his chair before turning off the terminal He realised he was very hungry and looked at his watch, he'd have to hurry if he was to make it in time for the last of breakfast. He headed for the lifts laughing and whistling

In no time at all he was standing on the fast moving transporter belt and arrived at the main dining hall The place was like a football stadium It could hold the entire colony at one sitting and still have room to spare. The level of population within the bunker was strictly controlled so that there was no chance of the hall ever being full Jared walked through the huge arched entrance and headed for his usual table. The hall was nearly empty now but he nodded at a couple of friends before picking his way through to his chair He looked about the hall for his girlfriend but there was no sign of her, they were only allowed to spend a maximum of two nights a week together and he missed her. He pushed the vending buttons on the table in front of him and the syntho-food soon appeared Jared ate wolfishly, the food was no better than it usually was but he found he had a greater appetite He had missed a couple of meals lately.

He was just finishing his meal when a young women slid into the chair opposite him and smiled

"Hello Jared how are you?"

"Hi Fiona, I'm fine, how are you?" Jared's girlfriend was a couple of years younger than he was.

"I waited ages for you this morning, how come you were late again, playing with that computer terminal I suppose?"

Jared shrugged, "I guess so"

"I don't know what you find so fascinating about it, you are odd, you know, Jared"

"I was just checking the radiation levels in Cholo"

"Well I don't suppose they've changed from yesterday, have they?"

"No, but listen, don't you want to get out of here"

"Of course I want to, when the time is right" replied Fiona "but I'm sure they'll let us know when it's safe"

"Yeah well I'm not so sure" said Jared sharply "anyway I beat my personal best at RAT today."

'That's great' said Fiona smiling, games were something she knew rather more about. "You are happy aren't you Jared, I mean happy with me and everything?"

"Yes of course I am, it's just this damn bunker If we could get out we could do what we liked"

"But we can do what we like here God knows what would happen to us up there, we would probably get killed Remember what happened to my rat" Fiona had had a baby rat which she found under the ducting in her pod. She had fed it and looked after it until it was old enough to look after itself She placed it back under the ducting and let it go free, but the next day when she looked under the panel she found it was dead. It had been killed by the other rats.

"I hardly think we could be compared to your rat After all we don't know if there is anybody else left on the planet"

"For all we know the war is still going on The computer doesn't report life in Cholo but its hot, there could be people elsewhere – hostiles"

"We don't know that, we don't really know anything, that's my whole point"

"I don't see any point in worrying about it There's nothing we can do"

"Well, I intend to find out what's really going on around here" Jared pushed the rest of his breakfast into the disposal chute and stood up.

'I'll see you later, I'm going to work."

Fiona watched him walk out the hall and shook her head, she didn't understand him at all They had a perfect life in the bunker, it was Utopia Why did he want to go and spoil it all? She frowned for a moment

and then smiled and chased after him, she wanted to talk about a dinner party next week

As Jared walked out of the hall a white suited man uncrossed his arms and moved forward from the wall he was leaning against As Jared saw him his forehead furrowed

"Hallo there, I thought one of you guys might show up"

"Just routine you know" Said the medic, "You know the score, nothing to worry about" His manner was friendly but firm

"O K , I'll come quietly, but you'll never make me talk."

"Sure, sure, everyone's a comedian nowadays." He led him towards the belts

Jared grimaced as they approached the familiar entrance to the bunker sanitorium, its gleaming white and polished metal surface dazzled his tired eyes He couldn't find it within himself to smile at the nurse behind the reception desk, even though her practised display of perfect teeth really demanded it He lay his palm over the metal plate and passed through to be greeted by the doctor

"Hello Jared good to see you again" he shook his hand warmly, "nothing to worry about, just a check up"

"I feel fine thanks doc"

"Good, good But we haven't been sleeping too well lately have we?"

"**Well I haven't been, Doctor, but I really don't know about you, shall I check with your new receptionist?**"

'Yes well I think we should get on with it don't you?" The doctor said hurriedly and ushered him through to the surgery

The room was large open and circular, on the floor lay a thick red carpet In the roof a series of window like panels curved, from which a soft light emanated In the centre of the room was a high backed black leather chair, built into the top was a circular, metallic device with fine tendrils extending from it Facing the chair was a desk on which sat a large monitor and a bank of instrumentation

"Into the chair please" said the doctor, "you know the procedure, nothing to it"

Jared slumped into the armchair, the back of his head resting against the spiky metallic device The nurse behind him made soothing noises and arranged the tendrils around his head The sharp points punched very slightly through the surface of his skin but were irritating rather than painful The doctor sat behind the desk and made some alterations with the instrumentation. Finally he nodded with a satisfied expression

"Looks pretty bad huh doc, do you think I'll live" said Jared?

"Now just answer these few questions please" replied the doctor, "It shouldn't take long"

"O K Shoot"

"How do you feel about your pod, is it a comfortable place to live in?"

"Sure its fine"

"Do you want to leave the bunker one day?"

"Of course I do Doesn't everybody?"

The doctor nodded his eyes leaving the monitor briefly to make a few notes "Are you happy in your work."

"Its voluntary isn't it?" demanded Jared

"Just answer the question please"

"Well not all the time no, its not what I thought it would be I don't get to use my brain, I'm just an organic arm of the computer She itches and I'm just sent to scratch her I don't even have to really know anything, I'm told exactly what to do A child could do it But I'm glad to do the job, I'd hate to sit around all day playing games and watching videos like the rest of the vegetables here"

"Well some of us work as well Jared"

"Yeah, how often do you ever see anybody?"

"We're here to talk about you Jared, not about me Now just one more question and you can run along"

"Go on then"

"What does the word 'bird' mean to you."

Jared tilted his head back and looked up to the arched panels, a smile came over his face

"A drunk in a midnight choir"

"What's that?" said the doctor quizzically

"Its a line from an old song It rhymes with 'like a bird on a telegraph wire"

The doctor made a final note then looked up and smiled at Jared, "Now I told you that wouldn't be too painful didn't I Nurse show Jared to the door please that will be all for now"

"Well thanks a lot doctor its been an education as always" He shook his head free of the tendrils and stood up from the chair running his hand through his hair,

"A little shorter than I wanted but that will do fine"

As he walked out of the surgery the new receptionist hit him with another platinum plated smile

"Have a nice day"

Waiting for him outside the door was Fiona, pacing anxiously up and

down. She grabbed him by the arm,

"Jared what on earth is going on?"

"There's nothing going on." It was awful hard sometimes to get a little peace in a nuclear bunker, he thought.

"I'm very worried about you Jared, why did the medics haul you off, what's it all about?"

"Oh its the usual thing, they just wanted to check inside the old fuse box."

"What's a fuse box, I do wish you'd talk sense."

Jared tapped the side of his head,

"The old grey matter, you know. They wanted to make sure I'm not freaking out from bunker syndrome."

"But why?"

"Well I sent the partner they assigned me away last night."

"You did what?"

"I sent her away. I didn't want her there, I wanted you."

"Oh you're just impossible, you're so selfish. You say you love me and then you go and do something like that. Why can't you just behave like any other normal person. Maybe you are suffering from the syndrome, you know what happened to your grand-father."

"I don't know. The family never talks about him."

"He must have done something pretty bad to get isolated, they don't send you to the exclusion zone for nothing."

"I suppose so. Look, lets not talk about him." Jared ran his hand affectionately over his girlfriends' bald head.

Crime didn't happen in the bunker. There were no fights, no quarrels, no thefts and no jealousies. At least hardly ever. The medics monitored for bunker syndrome, the name given to anybody who started suffering from panic about living underground. If anyone started to behave asocially they were immediately called in for tests and therapy. The doctors did their job very well and there had been no cases of seriously antisocial behaviour for decades. There had been very, very few cases of anybody being sent before the judge, the bunker judicial system, and fewer still who had been sentenced to the exclusion zone. Jared's grand-father had been one of them and like the rest he had never been seen again. Nobody knew what happened there and no one ever wanted to find out. Jared took Fiona by the arm,

"Come on let's get out of here, this place gives me the creeps."

Arm in arm they walked away, Jared nervously running his hands through his hair and twitching involuntarily.

"What's it like in there?" Asked Fiona

"Haven't you ever been inside?"

"No, I've never been sick in my life"

"Well neither have I, at least not really, I get this nightmare sometimes"

Fiona looked at him shocked,

"But nobody has nightmares, that's what the dream tapes and the choco are for"

"Yeah, well, I'm going to go into the office now, I'll see you later"

Fiona started to call after him as he jumped on the East-West belt, but he waved and was gone before she had a chance. She still hadn't fixed the dinner party

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In the main surveillance section of the Central computer unit a calm atmosphere prevailed. The technicians sat behind their terminals with practised relaxation. In the middle of the room two men sat playing chess and a young girl reclined gracefully on a lounging unit watching a video.

"Hey, doll face," said one of the players "get us some coffee"

One of the men at the terminals turned round, "Get it yourself, honey."

"Yeah, very funny, come on Mary it is your turn."

Mary looked up from the couch and flicked her shaggy blonde mane to one side, "Oh alright I suppose it is my turn." She stood up from the recliner and all eyes glanced at her. She had the kind of body that pouted if it didn't get attention. Lazily she just punched at the buttons on the vending unit. As she did so her eyes fell on the terminal to her right, suddenly her body went rigid.

"Oh my God..." Her voice was a whisper. All eyes whipped back to her.

"What's the matter have we run out of coffee again? Not another vending malfunction?" Said one of the chess players.

"Look." said Mary simply and pointed at the display unit.

"Sweet Jesus!" There was a universal shout and they all crowded around the terminal.

"Quick alert security or something" Said a tall dark guy who had been playing games on his own unit. Mary dashed to the opposite wall and

pushed a large red disc that lay flush in its surface Immediately a loud, insistent klaxon began to sound.

Within minutes five peace wardens came bursting through the door

"What's the panic? Which joker's been fooling around with the alarm in here?"

"This isn't a joke Check out the computer maintenance terminal over there"

The warden stepped over to the terminal and drew his breath in sharply

"Right I don't want anybody to leave this room, this is going to need investigation God, this looks like sabotage."

"Well nobody in here has done anything" Said Mary nervously

"Maybe not, but it would have to be one of you technical guys Nobody else has the access and nobody else has the knowledge"

"We don't program the thing, we just keep an eye on it. Christ the thing runs itself It tells us what to do"

"Well I don't know anything about this, all I know is it needs looking into, and nobody leaves here till I say so."

The warden looked distinctly worried, he pointed at two of his colleagues, "You two stay here and make sure no one leaves The rest of you come with me, the Captain can deal with this Damned if I know what to do"

The chief engineer tapped a couple of times on the keyboard, shook his head and looked up slowly. "Well captain there's no doubt about it, the system has been tampered with It's definitely sabotage"

In the bunker tampering with the Central Computer was the ultimate crime Everybody within it depended on the computer for their very lives It fed them, clothed them, kept them warm and kept them safe Without the computer there would have been no survivors To sabotage it put the lives of every inhabitant of the bunker in the severest jeopardy.

The Captain was visibly shocked He had held his position as Captain of the peace wardens for over two decades and this was the first crime he had ever had to deal with He wasn't at all sure he knew how to proceed

"What has actually been done?" He asked nervously

"As far as I can tell the damage is superficial Whoever it was that did this was after something else What we have here is a minor breakdown of one of the heat monitoring systems Our unknown saboteur was trying to disable the security protection on the master circuits I don't think he managed to do it, but he caused this breakdown in the attempt"

"Well can you fix it?" The captain was getting anxious

"Of course we can, the computer is telling us exactly where the damage is and what to do about it This is a minor problem, compared to the real problem of finding the person responsible If whoever it is tries again we might not be so lucky This particular system is an ancilliary back-up, if he had blown one of the main circuits we could have been in real trouble Do you realise how cold it would get down here if the heating went down?"

The captain didn't care to speculate, "Nobody must know about this Good God, we'd have a riot on our hands if the people knew about this"

"What about the klaxon that went off, there's bound to be a little curiosity about that?"

"Oh we've already announced that it was just a drill Everybody assumed it was anyway, we don't have emergencies in the bunker"

"Well, we didn't." Corrected the chief engineer

"Can you track this guy down?" Asked the Captain "I can't figure out how out scanners could have missed him He had to be an asocial, there must have been some signs, unless he just woke up this morning and suddenly decided to sabotage the bunker There's something very strange about all this"

"Well, we can find him alright Captain, or her, it's very simple He has to be one of my team of six maintenance engineers, only they would have the necessary knowlege to have done this

"Or yourself," added the Captain.

"Well, you can mindprobe me straight away if it will make you any happier I've got nothing to hide What we really need to worry about is finding our man in time, we don't want him striking again"

"Can't we just get your six people in here and just mindprobe the lot of them?" Asked the captain

"Four of them are out on assignment, the other two we can get in But if I put out an immediate recall alert for the others our man will know something's up God alone knows what he'd do then, he's obviously insane"

"No We don't want to panic him Look, we'll have your two engineers in for mindprobing immediately, it could be one of them Meanwhile, is there anyway of tracking down the identity of him through the computer"

"This guy's smart, he's broken the security overrides so we can't track him down by a personal priority classification But his calling card is in the machine somewhere, he can't get in without leaving it, all I've got to do is find the right place to look."

The Captain ran a troubled hand over his thinning grey hair, "Well, this is really your ballgame, I'll leave you to it whilst I interview your two engineers" He walked to the door and then paused, turning back "Oh and I'll be back for you after that, if we have no luck," he pointed at the burly peace warden standing by the entrance, "he's just here for your protection of course" Moreland nodded and left swiftly, the chief engineer smiled slightly and then hunched over his keyboard

In the recreation dome Simon Jones flipped through three hundred and sixty degrees and lashed out with his raquet, catching the floating spheroid perfectly at full force It slammed into the back panel signifying another goal

"Your game's right off today Jared, that's the third time in a row I've beaten you What's the problem, you don't seem yourself?"

"Oh I'm alright, I guess everybody has his off days from time to time."

"Yes I'm sure, but I've never beaten you this easily before and I can see you're worried Come on, you can talk to me about it It's not Fiona is it?"

"No, of course not I guess I just haven't been getting a lot of sleep lately that's all."

"You've been acting pretty weird for weeks now, are you sure it's nothing I can help with?" Simon puffed heavily and sat on the court next to Jared and helped him to unplug his A Grav wire

"Thanks," he said, "I don't know, it's just this damn bunker I don't suppose you'd understand but I just want to get out I have to get out Maybe I am going crazy."

"Have you spoken to the medics about this?"

Jared looked up with a wry smile, "They've spoken to me about it several times, I can't take a shower lately without glancing over my shoulder to check nobody's watching me"

Simon gave his friend a concerned look, the problem was obviously far worse than he had expected "You need to get yourself some help Listen Jared, the medics are there to help us, to help you. You make it sound as if they're plotting against you Can't you see you're getting a little paranoid"

"I told you you wouldn't understand Look don't worry about it, maybe you're right Anyway I'll sort it out." He slapped Simon on the back and stood up, "Listen I'm late on a job as it is, don't worry, next time we play you won't have it so easy."

"It would be hard You should go and get some sleep, it sounds like that's all you really need."

"Yeah maybe," he waved and headed for the changing rooms

Standing under the hard needle jets he thought about what his friend had said, but couldn't bring himself to agree with him. After all it was natural for humans to live outside, not underground like some kind of post nuclear troglodyte. He couldn't understand why it was just him who felt the way he did. It seemed like he was the only really sane person in the bunker, everyone else seemed perfectly happy to live out the rest of their lives incarcerated. He was beginning to suspect that many were even strongly opposed to leaving, even when it was safe. Well not Jared, he'd never be content with it. He dried himself and left the dome, heading for his pod.

Jared wriggled uncomfortably in the ducting, he had developed a cramp in his back and the narrow confines made it nearly impossible to ease it. Even though he hated confined spaces he liked being in the ducting. It was peaceful and it gave him the chance to think. It was hard to enjoy this luxury anywhere else, the bunker's lifestyle was founded on an antiseptic hedonism as far as he was concerned. He couldn't help feeling that they were treated like a group of babies in a nursery ward. They were allowed to do pretty much as they wanted so long as they stayed in the room where the nurses could keep an eye on them. No harm was allowed to come to them. He flipped over onto his front and as he did so he heard the tell tale, scratching sound of rats approaching. He hastily reached under him to his belt and unhooked his low level laser unit. After about sixty seconds the tell tale, beady eyes started to appear, glowing in the orange light about twenty yards away. Jared fired his unit directly in their midst. The laser pulsed brightly and Jared's eyes narrowed in the sudden glare. There was an immediate hideous squeaking and squealing as the pack retreated down the ducting. Jared placed his unit back on his belt, he knew he wouldn't be troubled for a while. The rats would be back to feast on their dead companions but not for a few hours. He often wondered what the rats fed on apart from themselves.

"Hey, what do the rats eat when there's none of their dead around."

"What do you mean by 'rats' Jared?" Asked the familiarly accommodating voice.

"You know what I mean. Rats. Rodents. The little creatures that scurry around your ducting. Hungry little beasts with greedy, glowing little eyes."

"There are no rats in the bunker Jared. This is a totally safe environment, there are no vermin here."

Jared sighed, he had questioned the computer before and he always

received the same reply

"What's the matter, have you got a farm of the beasts somewhere. Are they your protein source, what happens if some of them escape?"

Jared had a theory that the computer really knew all about the rats but that they featured in some scheme that the computer wasn't telling about. His favourite idea was that they were used for a food source, nobody knew the precise nature of the food origination within the bunker. It had to be made from something, after all the computer was powerful but it wasn't divine. The computer didn't reply.

"Worried about morale when they discover they've all been eating rat fricassee?" He demanded.

"There are no rats within the bunker." The computer repeated in the same pleasant tone. Jared laughed and turned over onto his back again, trying hard to rub between his shoulder blades. The light source from his screwdriver picked out the circuit that needed replacing and he quickly replaced it with a new one from his shoulder bag.

"This is a pretty mindless job."

"The bunker depends on you Jared; without your maintenance I wouldn't be able to operate at maximum efficiency. I'm sure everybody admires your diligence and skill, I know I'm grateful."

"Yeah, well, you're just a machine after all."

The computer remained silent, "Tell me," said Jared, "when do you think we'll be allowed out of here?"

"As you know, you will be released from the bunker when it is absolutely safe to do so. You could not survive on the surface with the present levels of radiation."

"Well when do you compute that it will be safe?" This was another question that he had asked countless times before and always received the same reply.

"I am not equipped to calculate the probability of such an event. I can only monitor the existing levels and report them."

"How long have we been down here?"

"Your present level of authority doesn't allow me to answer that question."

Jared had tried on numerous occassions to find out how many years the bunker colony had been in existence, without success. There were no records of the time immediately before the war that committed the inhabitants of Cholo to their underground city. Any references that could help the calculation of that information had been deleted from the existing records. The computer refused to give any help in this matter.

and Jared was at a loss to see why

"Who does have the authority to receive that information then?" He asked

"Your present level of authority doesn't allow the disclosure of that information"

"Who sets the levels of authority"

"The levels of authority have already been set"

"Yes but who set those levels?"

"Your present level of authority doesn't permit the disclosure of that information"

Jared gave up

Captain Riley looked up from the monitoring screen and shook his head sadly, "This one's clear as well, let him out of the chair Come on let's go and get Moreland He's the most qualified of the bunch, it's time we gave his brain a scan"

"You'll have a job finding it" quipped the engineer stepping from the chair

Moreland looked up from his terminal as the captain strode forcefully into the room "I've found our man Captain"

"Well who is it, tell me man?"

Moreland tapped a long finger on the terminal's display unit Captain Riley moved nearer to get a closer look and then nodded, "O K where is he?"

"He should have been back from his assignment a long time ago, he hasn't checked into the office yet"

"What's your guess Moreland? Do you think he's running wild out there? Can we check for signs of sabotage on the terminals?"

"Not yet Captain, we won't know about it till he's done it We only get the reports on malfunctions"

"Well I'm going to bring him in Can you give me a precise fix on his location?"

"I can give you the precise location of his last job, but if he's moved on from there then your guess is as good as mine"

"Well, it's a start"

Moreland hunched back over his keyboard and typed rapidly Within seconds the screen was replaced by a graphical representation of the bunkers' ducting He typed again and a tiny yellow light began to glow on the left hand side of the schematic

"Can we zoom in on this?" asked the Captain The picture was replaced again and rapidly changed as the Chief Engineer enlarged the relevant

section of the bunker. Finally he was left with an area that clearly indicated the exact location of the yellow light.

"This area that you are looking at on the screen now, covers approximately three miles. So you can see that if our man has moved from this spot we've got about as much chance of finding him as we have a needle in a haystack."

"What's a haystack?" Asked the Captain.

Jared turned the corner and stopped suddenly. Ahead of him stood two peace wardens armed with particle rifles. One of them was shining a flashlight into the entrance to the ducting that he had left a short while before, the other held his rifle pointing menancingly at the aperture.

"Hi guys, what's going on here, the rats getting really out of control?"

"This doesn't concern you, just routine you know. What are you doing here anyway ?"

Something held Jared from telling the truth, he had come back to retrieve his powerdrive which he had left it in the ducting.

"Oh I'm just on my way to the recreation dome. What's happening?"

"I've told you its just routine, a peace warden exercise. What's your name?"

"Simon Jones" said Jared, acting on instinct.

"Well, Simon I suggest you take the next belt system along we're kind of tying this one up with manoeuvres."

"Oh sure I'd hate to get in your way, have a nice day."

Jared turned the corner he had just come from and paused when out of sight, he found that his heart was beating unnaturally fast. After a short while he began to hear the wardens voices floating down the corridor.

"What do we know about this Jared anyway?"

"We know he's an asocial and that's enough. Those dudes are bad news."

'Why, have you dealt with one before?"

"No never, have you?"

"No."

"Well all I know is our orders are to be real careful, we don't know if he's armed or not. Either way I hope he doesn't surface here."

"Do we definitely know he's still down there?"

"That's what the chief engineer reckons."

Jared found he'd been holding his breath, he let it out slowly scared of drawing any attention to himself.

"Well I'm going to shoot first and ask questions later."

"Remember our orders, we've got to take him alive. Hell, we don't even know if he's armed or not."

"Yeah well, I don't want to find out the hard way."

"Don't worry about it, where's he going to get a weapon from?"

"They carry laser units don't they?"

Jared glanced nervously over his shoulder and then forward up the tunnel. He thanked his good luck, or sense, in carrying an extra power driver and began to open the panel that lay at his feet. Within seconds he was lowering himself into the ducting, pulling the panel into place over his head. He couldn't re-seal it from inside but he put the bolts into his pockets and hoped that nobody would notice that it had been opened. If they knew where he had re-entered the bunker it would make their job of finding him a whole lot easier. He began to slowly make his way, hand over hand, down the rungs and deep into the ducting. Coming to the bottom he branched off to the right and headed through the maze to a central junction area where he knew there would be more room. After an hour of determined scrambling he came to where the ducting widened out as three tunnels converged. Jared leaned his back against the wall and straightened himself. The luxury of being able to sit upright was well appreciated. From his position he could keep an eye on the entrances to all three tunnels. He only had one dim light switched on for fear of drawing unwanted attention. He didn't really want any visitors, rodent or humanoid. If any humans approached he would see their lights long before they saw his, and by the time they arrived he would be long gone. The rats were a problem but he had his laser unit with him, and who knows, if need be they could provide him with food. His supplies were low to say the least and maybe laser barbequed rodent wasn't all bad. None the less, he didn't relish the prospect.

Time passed slowly, when ever he looked at the digital display on his wrist unit he was constantly surprised. The quiet began to play on his mind, he used to find the peace relaxing but alone and frightened it now had a menacing quality that he didn't savour. He opened his shoulder bag and checked his food rations. He had four meal bars and one bottle of juice. He carefully peeled the silver foil off one of the bars and ate it. He washed it down with a swig of the juice and felt his spirits lift somewhat. Nonetheless he was worried about the extent of his food and was very conservative with his drink. He resolved to eat only half a bar the next time around. He panicked when he overheard the two wardens and had shot as far away as quickly as possible. His immediate idea was to put as

much space between him and the wardens as he could and then to think things through. He had been thinking, but he still couldn't make any sense of it. He placed the bottle back in his bag and settled down to try and get some sleep.

Jared moved his hand drowsily towards his ear and scratched, then started bolt upright as a small pair of razor sharp teeth sank into his flesh. He screamed and shook his hand free of the rat that hung dangling from his finger, its eyes glowing with a feral intensity in the low orange lamp light. It screeched as it fell to the floor and joined the mass of rodents that were clamouring around Jared's feet. His body was covered with the hungry little beasts and he shook his body in a wild panic, his head banging on the roof of the ducting. He kicked his leg at the grey squirming mass but they clung determinedly and worked their way upwards towards the soft, white, exposed flesh of his neck and face. He threw his body against the wall crushing the rodents. Brushing them squeeling from his body, he grasped quickly at his laser unit and pulled on the trigger sweeping the corruscating fire wildly about him. The rats fell back immediately, their eyes red in the sudden glare and their teeth bared. Jared fired another blast and they swarmed back down the tunnel their claws scratching and screetching on the metal floor of the ducting. Around Jared lay a mass of charcoaled and smouldering bodies, a thick smoke hung in the air and a foul odour assaulted his nostrils. He ran a shaking hand over his forehead and then staggered towards the left hand tunnel wretching violently. Going back to his place by the wall he kicked the dead rats into the tunnel and sat down shivering. The heating system wasn't designed to keep the ducting warm and Jared wasn't dressed for the temperature. He pulled his bag open and swilled his mouth with juice and spat it away immediately regretting the waste.

The hours passed slowly, he wrapped his arms around him and sat watching the tunnels with a wild and worried look in his eyes. He held his laser with a fierce grip and his knuckles were white with the tension. He broke into another food bar after a couple of hours and though he had resolved not to, he ate all of it. Being sick had emptied his stomach and he sorely felt the need to assauge the hollow feeling of emptiness. He talked to himself at first and sang, but after a while he was silent for fear of attracting the rats or a search party. His thoughts turned over in his head and in the unnatural quiet it seemed as though he was shouting to the whole bunker. He felt his head nodding and he drifted into the uneasy dreams of a hunted man, his body still rigid and the laser still held firmly in his grasp.

Jared awoke in the dark, it was now four days since he had escaped into the ducting. He switched on his hand held, computer communications device.

"Hello there what day is it?"

"It's Tuesday Jared and I really think its time you came back up. I don't know why you're staying down there." Jared flicked his unit off. He had long since abandoned hope of getting any useful information from the computer. His food supplies had gone the day before. Was it night? His wrist clock told him it was but he had lost all real track of time, the numbers didn't mean anything to him. He ran his hand over the rough growth on his face and stifled a yawn. His ears suddenly pricked up as he heard the now familiar scratching sound of rats approaching. He hastily switched on the low lamp unit and narrowed his eyes. Ahead in the left hand tunnel he picked out the eyes of the advancing rodents. His night sight had improved dramatically in the four days he had been in the ducting. He slipped his laser unit from his belt and set the charge to minimum. With a squeal the pack of rats came charging down the last ten yards towards Jared, he fired the unit directly in their midst and the sickly smell of burnt rodent flesh once again filled his nostrils. He pointed the unit at the retreating creatures to give them a final blast but as he pulled on the trigger nothing happened. He tried again frantically and then again but with the same result, his power unit was dead. He hurled the unit down the tunnel and cursed loudly, his voice echoing deep into the distance. The rats would be back in about two hours, they had grown increasingly bolder over the days, perhaps they knew he was a man on limited time. "Well you've not got me yet!" He shouted and moved forward to pick up his discarded weapon from amongst the pile of still smoking bodies and choked back his urge to vomit. He had decided that he must get out of the ducting, he had no choice now, the rats would get him if the wardens didn't. He moved slowly back down the tunnel he had entered from, his pace considerably slower on the return journey. An eternity later he was at the top rung of the upward passage, he took a deep breath and pushed his hand on the panel, praying that it hadn't been spotted and re-bolted. He was in luck, the panel slid smoothly up and to the side and Jared climbed thankfully through the opening. Once through, he tried to stand up but the days of being bent double had taken their toll, and he had to sit against the wall for a minute to ease his tortured muscles. The light in the corridor was at the lowest level, the bunker was asleep. After a few minutes Jared straightened painfully and replaced the panel, but kept the bolts in his pocket.

He progressed nervously down the northward belt system his eyes darting in every direction and his shoulders still hunched with pain After a while he came to a main thoroughfare, the ceiling of the corridor arching high above his head and light growing steadily brighter To his left he saw far into the distance the familiar white suit of a peace warden, he jumped on the transverse belt and luckily avoided detection His original plan had been to try and get back to his pod, recharge his laser unit, change his clothes and pick up some food He now realised that would be useless, his pod was bound to be under surveillance He noticed suddenly that he was heading in the direction of his girlfriend's pod and decided that though it was a risk, she was his only real hope Two belts later he jumped off the system and walked carefully past the first row of residential pods Fiona's pod was set apart from the main causeway and the other pods in the section He pushed his palm against the bell panel and looked up as the surveillance device centered on his face After a couple of minutes the door slid upwards and Fiona was standing in the doorway with a very tired and confused look on her face

"My God, Jared, what are you doing here at this time?"

"You are alone aren't you?" He asked, realising for the first time that Fiona might have company

"Yes I am, look where have you been, I've been trying to get hold of you for days?"

"It's a long story Can I come in?"

"I suppose so" She stepped aside and then swung the door down as Jared entered and passed through to her living room

"Look at the state of your clothes, what have you been up to? No, don't tell me yet, go and have a shower and then you can tell me Oh and have a shave while you're at it"

Jared gratefully followed her instructions and ten minutes later be was feeling clean, refreshed and in severe need of a drink He emerged from the bathroom in a white cotton robe and sat comfortably into a plasto-bubble

"Have you got a Gin and Tonic," he asked

"Here, I've already fixed it" Fiona handed him the drink and then sat in a plasto-bubble opposite him

"Now tell me what on earth is going on around here?"

Jared made her promise to secrecy and then told her the whole story Half an hour later she tucked him up in her bed and held his head as he fell asleep, a very worried expression on her face

He was in the same room, the walls were as smooth and hard as ever

He ran his hand frantically over the walls but could find no break He breathed deeply

"I mustn't panic, there has to be a way out" he said to himself over and over again He ran from one wall to the other but gradually they grew closer and closer Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and his eyes grew wider as the room grew narrower He pushed both hands against the opposing walls and tried to hold them apart, it was no use His breath grew short and ragged, he screamed finally and threw himself to the floor covering his head and eyes with his arms

"Help me!" He screamed!

"Oh we'll help you alright" said an unfamiliar voice

Jared took his arms from around his head and opened his eyes He was lying on the floor of Fiona's rest module He looked up, flanked by two armed peace wardens stood Captain Riley, about to make his first arrest in thirty-five years of service

"What do you want?" Said Jared weakly

"We want you" said the Captain sharply, "I think you know why we're here"

"Well you're wrong there, what are you guys hounding me for, what's it all about?"

"You're under arrest"

Captain Riley savoured the expression

"Now I suggest you get dressed quickly and come along with us Sergeant, give him a hand, and pick up his laser unit"

"Nobody gets arrested" said Jared shocked

"Not lately" said the Captain, "you're my first"

"Yeah well this is my first time as well, just what is it I'm supposed to have done?"

"Oh we'll fill you in down at headquarters."

"That's what I'm worried about"

"You're a cool one alright" said the Sergeant "now be a good fellow and get dressed"

"We'll see how he makes out with the Judge," said the Captain as Jared went through to get dressed

The two guards took an arm each and propelled him towards the door The captain turned to the tearful girl who stood by the entrance

"Thanks miss, you did the right thing"

"I'm only trying to help Jared" she called out as he was led away He looked at her over his shoulder but didn't say a word

The prison cell was round and very, very soft If you pushed into the wall

it just gave way and altered its shape to fit your body If you ran and threw yourself at it, it would catch you like a baseball in a catcher's glove There was no furniture and the soft ambient lighting emanated from the wall itself Jared lay curled on the floor

The lighting grew gradually brighter and then a section of the wall slid backwards to reveal a door opening Through the door walked a white suited peace warden, in his hand he carried a lightweight particle rifle He waved it at the prisoner

"Get on your feet, it's time for your interview with the Captain"

Jared shook his head and stood up, his feet were unsteady on the soft surface of the floor but he made his way slowly to the door At least, he thought, he'd had a good night's sleep with no further nightmares Nowadays he woke up for them The warden propelled him forward with the barrel of his rifle

"You know this is all a big mistake" Jared said over his shoulder

"You're right, and I guess you're the one who made it"

"I'm telling you, you've got the wrong guy"

"Sure, sure"

The guard clearly wasn't interested in making conversation and Jared continued the journey in silence They came to the end of a long corridor in front of a pair of shiny, stainless steel doors The guard stepped forward and put his hand on the metal plate, a red light pulsed along the top of the door frame and the two doors slid noiselessly apart Jared glanced up and waved at the row of surveillance eyes before stepping through They were met on the other side by three more armed peace wardens who escorted him quickly down another short corridor and into a small office A hard faced lady looked up from the thick file she was reading

"Good morning young man, I trust you slept well?"

Jared smiled wryly and said nothing

"Yes, well take a seat, my name is Lavinnia Masters I've been appointed as your lawyer I'm afraid it's not my usual line" She added apologetically.

"I'd like to say it's a pleasure to meet you, but under the circumstances ..." Jared shrugged

"Well there's not really a lot to it, I imagine you'll be pleading guilty"

"Guilty! No I won't I'm not guilty of anything What is it I'm supposed to have done?" Jared demanded His lawyer looked surprised, "Sabotage, you've been arrested for trying to sabotage the Central Computer"

Jared's mouth dropped open "But that's crazy, I've never heard

anything so ridiculous"

"Does this mean you're going to plead not guilty?" She was clearly irritated.

"Yes Miss Masters, it certainly does."

Jared looked with interest at the teak desk, it was the first time he had ever seen anything made from wood. He ran his fingers tenderly along its smooth, polished surface

"Nice isn't it" Said the Captain.

"It's beautiful, I have a great interest in antiques"

" You seem to have some pretty old fashioned ideas as well"

He gave Jared a searching look, "Your lawyer tells me that you're going to plead not guilty"

"Lawyer! She's a bloody librarian"

"Yes, well," coughed the Captain, "There's not a lot of call for lawyers you know"

"Well I am going to plead not guilty because I am not guilty, of sabotage or anything else."

"We have it on the authority of your chief engineer that you're our man. Come on, why don't you just admit it. The truth will come out when you come before the judge, you can't hide it. Why don't you save yourself the embarrassment of a public trial and give us a full statement now"

"Look I've told you, I don't know anything about this. I've got no need to worry about a trial, I've got nothing to hide."

"Well you did hide, didn't you, for four days in the ducting. If you hadn't done anything why did you do that."

"Because your goons were out looking for me, carrying particle rifles and in no mood for civilised discussion. I would have been in the protein pool quicker than you could say jurisprudence."

The captain gave him a long appraising stare. "You're not making things any easier for yourself son, but if that's the way you want to play it."

The court was shaped like a huge Greek ampitheatre. Tiers of seats led down in a sweeping oval to a raised stage. In the middle of the stage was a single chair and to the right of the chair was a large video screen. The chair was similar to the one in the sanitorium, it had the same metallic device with an array of tentacles, but it also had clamps for the arms and legs.

Jared was led onto the stage by two guards and secured into the chair.

The auditorium was packed with countless fascinated faces They had never witnessed such an event before Everyone within the bunker over the age of sixteen was present, and all eyes were fixed intently on Jared The lights dimmed and the video screen flickered into life

"Are you Jared Rumbold?" It asked through a swirl of colour

"I am"

"Proceed with palm and retina confirmation."

The two guards who stood behind Jared moved forward. One of them fitted a retina scanner over his left eye whilst the other positioned his right hand over the centre of the ID plate The screen swirled, "Identify affirmed Jared Rumbold you are hereby charged with the crime of sabotage upon the Central Computer, how do you plead?"

"Not guilty" Jared shouted and a murmer ran around the auditorium So the Judge is a computer, thought Jared, he wasn't really surprised

"A plea of not guilty has been recorded. Attach the mind-probe."

One of the guards stepped forward again and began attaching the fine tentacles to Jared's head Jared squirmed, the bright colours on the screen were replaced by a huge picture of Jared's face The Judge's voice echoed around the huge auditorium, "Did you Jared Rumbold, on the fourteenth of this month attempt to override the security clearance restraints on the Central Computer Thereby causing a breakdown in the ancillary heating system B14?"

"I did" said Jared Rumbold's face on the screen.

"I didn't" shouted Jared

"Do you therefore admit sabotage to the Central Computer?" asked the Judge

"I do" said Jared on the screen

Jared writhed in his chair trying in vain to break free of his bonds, "It's a lie" he screamed "I didn't do anything"

The Judge's calm, neutral voice once more filled the hall

"The evidence is overwhelming, you were alone in the Central Computer unit on the morning of the fourteenth, you were the only person accessing the computer at the time of sabotage and we now have your subconscious confession Is there anything that you wish to say before I pass sentence?"

"What about my lawyer, I'm innocent" Jared shouted

"Your lawyer is only required if you had pleaded guilty. Anyway she can serve no purpose here, the brain scan provides the only evidence and testimony that we require."

Jared's mind was spinning, "But I'm innocent I tell you, I'm innocent"

"I shall now pass sentence" said the Judge.

From the middle of the auditorium a scream rang out, "I'm sorry Jared, I was only trying to help you." The woman in front of Fiona turned around and through a mouthful of popcorn asked her to be quiet.

"The exactitudes of the law allow no deviation from the sentence allotted for a crime of this seriousness. You, Jared Rumbold, have admitted to the crime of sabotage upon the Central Computer. There is no worse crime within the Bunker. The lives of all its inhabitants depend upon it for their continued existence. Your actions have placed that existence in the gravest danger. I have no recourse but to sentence you to isolation, you will be sent to the exclusion zone."

Jared shook his head in disbelief, the pin sharp points of the tentacles digging further in. "It's not fair!" He shouted. "I haven't done anything. I don't want to die."

All the lights had faded, the video had dimmed and the single spotlight focused on Jared showed him twitching and kicking and straining against the clamps. Simon Jones turned away closing his eyes and ran his hand sympathetically over the smooth head of Jared's girlfriend who was sobbing uncontrollably on his shoulder.

The Captain led Jared away from the stage, his head was bowed and he walked as though in a dream.

"We take you straight from here to the zone, son" said the Captain, "once the Judge has passed sentence there's nothing either you or I can do about it. Do you want to say goodbye to anybody before we go, there is a little time left?"

Jared looked up slowly, "No, nobody" he said.

"Don't you want to say goodbye to your girlfriend or anybody?"

He laughed ironically, "No, I don't want to see anybody. Look can't we just get this over with."

"Okay," said the Captain "if that's the way you want it."

At the end of the corridor that had led them from the stage they came to a black metal door, the captain walked up to it and positioned his hand and left eye. The door slid open.

"Only I can open this door, just me in the whole of the bunker. I've got to tell you I never expected I'd ever have to do it, and I hope I never have to again."

Ahead of them stretched a stainless steel tube like any of the other corridors in the bunker, only in this one twenty yards down was a

shimmering wall of light There was a mobile platform just past the door and Jared stepped onto it The Captain fastened his hand to the front rail and pushed the forward switch Slowly the platform moved along the tunnel, taking Jared closer and closer to the wall of bright and multi-coloured lights As the Captain watched, Jared passed wordlessly into its midst and disappeared Sadly the Captain stepped back and sealed the corridor by closing the large black door

As Jared passed through the lights he shut his eyes to shield them against the glare When he opened them he found he was at the end of the corridor, it didn't stretch much past the wall of light The clamp around his wrist sprang open and he stepped confused from the platform Ahead of him was another door, this time, however, it had a handle It turned easily in Jared's hand and he pulled the door towards him and stepped into the room that lay ahead The door shut behind him and as Jared spun around he saw that there was no handle on the inside He spun back again and saw that he was in an empty, square room There were no doors set into the smooth metallic walls – there was no way out

"Relax, Jared" said an almost familiar voice

He looked around but there was nobody there, "Where are you, who are you?

"I am the bunker" said the voice simply, "I am Lucy, I am the maintenance support computer, I am the Central Computer I control everything"

Jared shook his head, "I don't understand this, what am I doing here?"

"You are here, Jared, because you have been chosen"

"Chosen, chosen for what?"

"Chosen" said the voice "to save the colony"

Jared rubbed his eyes and looked about him, he was sure that this wasn't another nightmare but it certainly seemed like one

"Listen, I don't know what all this is about but I've had enough, are you going to let me out of here or not?"

"Certainly Jared Come through"

The forward panel of the wall slid upward revealing a room behind it, he stepped through the opening into a large room with high ceilings In the middle of the room was a large glass tank, within it was a very dark yellow liquid, it was crusted on the top with a few brown blotches The air in the room smelt sweet and somehow very ancient

"Welcome Jared Rumbold" said the voice

"You mean this is you" said Jared incredulously

"Yes it is, are you surprised, did you expect a huge metallic object"

"Well something along those lines yes"

"I am an organic computer To a certain extent I am a living being"

"I don't understand any of this, are you going to let me go back home?"

"There is only one way for you to get out of here Jared and it won't be to go back to what you call home You've always had a thirst for information Sit down and I'll explain it all to you."

At that moment a panel slid aside on the floor and a chair arose from it, Jared sat on it has face creased with confusion

"As you know a long time ago the world was heading towards the most major war of its sordid history There had been serious wars before of course, human history is stained with the details of global conflict This war was significantly different, however Mankind now had the technological power to destroy itself As the political situation worsened between the two major blocks of power, the idea of a bunker such as this one was conceived This bunker was finally completed just weeks before the outbreak of the war"

"Do you mean we are the only bunker?" Asked Jared

"Yes, I am the only bunker" said the computer "There has been no register of human life, so I can only suppose that the enemy had no such facility The design of conventional bunkers prior to my construction was in no way adequate for the holocaust that followed the first strike Cholo was the largest and most strategically important allied city, it was for this reason that they had the most advanced bunker and the most advanced defence system As with any system though, there is the possibility of error and Cholo's wasn't perfect"

Jared's attention was absolute, he had the feeling that he was going to have the answers to the questions he'd been asking all his life He just wasn't sure what the price was that he'd have to pay for the information

"As you are aware, this bunker is sealed and can't be opened from the inside The theory was that when the radiation levels were low enough for human tolerance, the droids on the surface would open the bunker and release the inhabitants Unfortunately problems developed with this plan"

"What do you mean, problems?"

"The attack on Cholo was devastating, half the city was destroyed The bunker as you know was immune from attack and most of the city's inhabitants were safe within here at that time What the attack did manage to do however was find the one weak point in our system They managed to destroy the communications centre between myself and the droids I have no control over the droids that are operating topside, the

droids that were in the bunker were recycled I couldn't risk them existing out of my control In the main they were maintenance droids which is why I need the assistance of humans such as yourself in the simple task of replacing circuits"

"Wait a minute" said Jared "Are you telling me that it's safe outside here, that the radiation levels are low enough for human tolerance?"

"There is no serious radiation, but it certainly isn't safe out there The defence systems are still fully armed and they're not programmed to tell the difference between a bunker inhabitant and a hostile alien They'll attack and obliterate anything that moves"

"How long has the radiation level been safe"

"Three hundred and twenty two years" said the computer

"My God, why didn't you tell us?"

"My design specifications wouldn't permit it I am programmed to protect my inhabitants, I am the most advanced artificially intelligent computer ever built My design requries me to safeguard psychological welfare as well as physical There are enormous sociological and psychological problems for a whole community living trapped in a limited space The top experts in all fields of human interaction were instrumental in formulating my database I calculated that if the people within the bunker knew that the radiation levels were safe outside there would be a mass hysteria when they discovered they couldn't get out People who were happy living in the bunker would become claustrophobic and paranoid The whole structure of the society would become debased, there would be rioting and anarchy I could not let that happen and that is why I maintain the false radiation reports

"So what am I doing here and why are you telling me?"

"As I said, you were chosen, there's a job for you to do"

"Yes I know, to free the colony, how?"

"I have no control over the droids on the surface but we do have access to them It needs a human with very special skills to take that control, to disable their defence systems and to send them to open the seals and liberate the bunker"

"So, I've just been set up," Jared's face was crimson, he shouted at the glass tank

"There was no sabotage, no crime at all You just manipulated me"

"That is a correct analysis"

"Why? Why didn't you just ask me, why put me through all this"

"For the good of the whole colony, nobody else could know about this You had to be isolated There was no other way to preserve the secrecy"

"You mean that I can't go back then?" Said Jared

"The only way for you to be re-united with your people is to be successful in liberating them I cannot let you return with the knowledge that I have now given you"

"You bastard"

"Not of course strictly accurate, my existence was brought about by that extraordinary human marriage between destruction and survival If I had been constructed with the aid of philosophers rather than psychologists perhaps I could have developed this interesting thought"

"Why was I chosen?"

"Your unique abilities on the RAT computer game mainly You see you're the best that has ever played it Nobody has ever rated a higher score in this history of the bunker"

"So what"

"It's not a game, it's a test A selection process When you passed that test other checks were made to ensure your capabilities and motivations"

"The medical scans"

"Yes absolutely The scans confirmed my choice in you"

"How many other choices have you made?"

"Only four" replied the computer"

"My Grandfather?" Asked Jared

"He was the last"

"He failed then What happens if I fail"

"I'm sure of your capabilities – you're the best yet But if you fail then you will still be able to make a contribution to the bunker"

"How?"

"I told you I was an organic computer You will be offered the opportunity to contribute to my continued longevity Your brain patterns will be totally absorbed by me and your body fluids will be extracted for addition to the tank My protein level is falling to a near critical level, you will observe the brown discolouration on the top of the tank fluid This is causing some minor problems in the administration of the bunker You will have noticed the increase of systems malfunctions"

"So I have to be successful or I m terminated"

"It is regrettable but for the sake of the whole community it is unavoidable"

"Meanwhile the whole community look on me as low criminal and think I deserved to die anyway"

"Unfortunately nobody will know of your heroic nature unless you are

successful"

"There's nothing heroic about me," said Jared, "after all, I didn't choose this, did I!"

In front of him a panel of the wall slid aside and a console came forward. The terminal in front of him illuminated with a low hum.

"This is your control station" said the computer, "from here you can view through robotic eyes the city of Cholo. You must contact and take control of the droids. You must neutralise the weapons systems before you can release the mechanisms sealing the bunker. As you can see, it is very much like the RAT game that you are so skilled at."

"Yeah it's like the game" thought Jared, only this time his life depended on it, not to mention the lives of all the inhabitants of the bunker. A hero, he thought, well, he sure didn't feel like one.

"If you're so awfully smart" he shouted at the tank, "why don't you just take control of this console and control the droids from here?"

"As I said Jared," replied the calm voice, "I'm only artificially intelligent. The control interface mechanisms were destroyed, it has to be done by a human. They may not be as smart but at least their intelligence is real."

Jared looked at the desk in front of him, by the side of the monitor was a slim manual. He was determined to come out of this alive, there was a certain bald friend of his he wanted a word with. He flicked the switch to the activated position and took a deep breath.

"Good luck!" Said the computer.

FIREBIRD